Reducing the time taken for issuing of Passports

3337. SHRI SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what is the average of the number of days taken to issue a passport at the Regional Passport Office at Bombay;

(b) what is the average of the number of days taken to issue a passport at the passport offices in other cities of India; and

(c) what steps are being taken to reduce the waiting period at Bombay and other cities?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (PROF. K. K. TEWARI): (a) 45 to 60 days.

(b) Information is being collected and would be laid on the Table of the House.

(c) The delay in the issue of passports is mainly due to a sharp increase in the number of applications received during 1988. Arrangement for overtime payment and additional staff on contingency basis have been made. A fresh staff inspection unit study has also been initiated to increase staff in various Passport Offices commensurate with the increased workload. A number of cases are pending with Police/other authorities. Periodical reminders are being sent to police authorities to expedite their reports. Steps have been taken to ensure expeditious police verification without sacrificing security requirement.

Agreements with France

3338. SHRI MURLIDHAR CHANDRAKANT BHANDARE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question 103 given in the Rajya Sabha on the 22nd February, 1989 and state what action has been taken or is being taken regarding the agreements for closer economic and technological co-operation, signed between France and India during the recent visit of the President of France to India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH): During the recent visit of the President of France to India an Agreement on Scientific and Technical Cooperation in Bio-technology and a Memorandum of Understanding between the Indian Council of Medical Research and French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Institute National de la Sante at de la Recherche Medicale) were signed. In pursuance of the Agreement for Scientific and Technical Cooperation in Bio-technology a human Viral Vaccines Project will be established in Gurgaon, Haryana in the joint sector. The joint venture and technical cooperation agreements between the three promoting partners namely Department of Bio-technology, Government of India, the Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Limited (IPCL) and Institute Meriuex of France have been signed for the establishment of a R&D cum Production Unit for the manufacture of moasles, rabies (Vere), inactivated polio and quadruple (DPTP) vaccines. The project has been sanctioned by the Government of India to be established in Gurgaon District of Haryana.

No development has taken place so far under the MOU signed between ICMR and the French Institute for Health and Medical Sciences.

Sanctuaries to Refugees from Tibet

3339. SHRI B. SATYANARAYAN REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what is Government's assessment of the present situation in Tibet; and

(b) whether there is any likelihood of exodus of refugees from Tibet to India in the wake of declaration of Martial Law there by China and whether India would provide sanctuaries to those refugees?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH): (a) Government are aware of reports of widespread demonstrations and disturbances in Lhasa. There have been reports of the loss of several lives and the declaration of martial law in Lhasa.

(b) No exodus of refugees from Tibet into India has been noticed recently. Government's approach towards refugees continues to be based on well-established traditions and principles.

Hurdles in boosting the Tourist Traffic

3340. DR. YELAMANCHILI SIVAJI: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM be pleased to state what are the hurdles coming in the way of boosting tourist traffic in our country, when the countries like Maldives, Singapore, Hongkong and China are going well ahead and what steps are being taken to overcome them?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM (SHRI SHIVRAJ PATIL): There has been an appreciable increase in tourist arrivals in India during the Seventh Five Year Plan, showing an increase of 10.4 per cent against the target of 7 per cent. Additionally, the average stay of a foreign tourist in India is 30 days as against 3—5 days in Maldives, Singapore, Hong Kong, etc.

The main limiting factor in achieving higher growth rate is constraint of resources resulting in inadequate infrastructural facilities, insufficient airline capacity, shortage of tourist accommodation, etc. To promote tourism to India, Government is taking several steps which include diversification of Indian tourism from cultural-oriented tourism to holiday and leisure tourism, development of facilities for trekking, winter and water sports, wildlife, beach tourism, etc. In addition, Government has recently granted a number of fiscal and financial incentives to attract private sector investment in tourism so as to strengthen tourism infrastructure in the country.

House Building Advance to Railway Employees

3341. SHRI M. KADHARSHA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Railway authorities take more than two years to sanction house building advance to their employees particularly those working at railway stations and in the regional offices in Western Railway; and

(b) if so, whether Government propose to evolve such a method whereby railway employees are saved from undue delays in sanctioning house building advance?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI MAHABIR PRASAD): (a) No, Sir. House Building Advance is generally sanctioned to Railway employees with in a period of one to two months subject to availability of funds and submission of proper requisite documents.

(b) Does not arise.

Imposition of penalty on Nepalese Companies for over-loading of Coal Wagons

3342. SHRI M. KADHARSHA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received representations from three Nepalese Companies namely Ankita